

An Essay on  
Theses Medici—

Respectfully submitted to  
The Faculty of the

Homoeopathic Medical College  
of Pennsylvania

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## Theses Medici

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To present an article on the utility of writing medical essays, may be regarded a novelty in this enlightened age, and especially so, when such an article is offered for the consideration of an enlightened board of professors, as an evidence in part of medical attainments. That there is a distinguished use in requiring such an exercise of every candidate for graduation cannot be doubted; yet the system so long in vogue, and instituted for so wise a purpose, may not be wholly exempt from serious objections. The latitude given for the selection of subjects not unfrequently proves the source of indecision, and loss of time to the student. He is made aware of the fact, that on, or before a certain date, he must present a thesis of his own composition and writing upon some medical subject as an



exercise preliminary to his graduation. The very fact itself begets a desire, long before the time arrives, to hit upon a topic that will answer the double purpose of making a fair display of scientific attainments and a kind of originality that will reflect some credit upon his own capacity and powers. Since the labor has to be performed, and there being no definite restrictions as to subjects, that of "Theses medicæ" is chosen; and the considerations offered with reference to the same are intended to be in the highest degree respectful to the Faculty whose duty it is to judge of their merits. What is the design of a medical thesis? This question may be answered, that it should be a treatise upon some medical subject couched in language of the strictest propriety, and containing a definite arrangement of



principles that may be of use to the profession at large; and the idea of requiring such a production from a candidate is but asking of him some manifestation of his capacity for performing this service, if per-adventure it may come within the province of his professional duties. Is this the general character of those presented for the degree of Doctor of medicine? were we to judge from the quiet slumber with which nearly all such productions are favored, we cannot resist the conclusion that but little comparatively is contained in them of sufficient value to pass upon an enduring record. In view of this, may it not be respectfully asked if the whole system does not need a kind of pruning, that will turn it to a better account. At present the unrestricted latitude, offered the student, imposes upon him a sort of labor in vain; his duty



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in this respect does not seem to be sufficiently defined. The matter is not brought home to him; having no definite direction, ten thousand subjects fleet across his mind that set his thoughts flying in all directions like feathers in a whirlwind; when one subject nearly fixes his attention, another more auspicious, crowds it out of his mind; another makes war upon this, and so on, until time and patience both become exhausted; and still the thoughts roll on like boisterous waves dashing upon the rocks, found in wild irregularity and confusion upon the coast. At last he fixes upon a subject because he must; and then follows another train of thoughts, all about the subject of his inaugural exercise; all other studies must be laid aside, for the purpose of consulting books, lectures, etcetera, that unfold the nature of the



subject He may derive the advantage of thorough acquaintance with it, by pursuing this course; but, the disadvantage of neglecting matters of greater importance is easily to be taken into account.

Students are not generally habituated to writing essays, because there is something of a task about it; and besides they suffer under a sense of failure, when they undertake to write upon a subject amply delineated in some one of their text books. They prefer studying to writing when in the pursuit of professional knowledge. They have neither time, nor opportunity for handling intricate subjects upon which they have no experience. Only think of one attending five lectures a day, hunting for a subject upon which to write a thesis, when a score of different practical subjects are sounding in his ears every day. He



listens to lectures upon the whole catalogue of diseases, and medical subjects, contained in his routine of studies; he thinks of pneumonia, Cynanche trachealis, pertussis, epilepsy, apoplexy, hysteria, scarlatina, measles, gout, &c. &c. until his mind sinks into a worse pathological condition than his body would be in, if afflicted with all these diseases together. However he has to write and he rushes headlong into something and begins to compile. The first sentence may be his own, the next is compiled and book after book is consulted to bring together a medley of other peoples brains upon the subject, in order to complete the work. If lexicons could talk, and the text books could bear audible testimony, they would testify to a profligate waste of time in the consummation of this exercise; and often to a petty delinquency with regard to



plagiarism; but this might seem war-  
rantable, since his whole mind is bent  
upon accomplishing a work, which perhaps  
is to be regarded a marvel by the profes-  
sors which he intends to instruct.

Now in consideration of this  
awkward position, which nine out of ten  
of all the candidates for graduation expe-  
rience; would it not be better to restrict  
theses writing to the personal experience, in  
some way or shape, of the writers. Who is  
there, that has been long in the pursuit  
of medicine, who cannot place himself in  
a position, to have a little experience of  
his own, that if written, will serve himself  
and the profession to which he aspires,  
much better than a compilation?  
If one suffers a morbid derangement, let  
him note carefully his whole experience  
of the matter; the cause, if he can, the



effect, the cure, and the remedy, or if he chooses to record another kind of experience, let him pluck some untried medicinal substance, from the vast resources of nature, and study the best mode of preparing it for use, and then, let him try its virtues upon himself. A faithful record of all these things may not only benefit the student, but render him a useful member of the profession.

Or if more in accordance with his inclination he may tax his powers of observation with regard to things that surround him. If he sees a case of small pox, let him note its natural history and cure, and commit the whole to paper; he can note the premonitory symptoms, the primary appearance of the eruption, the duration of the disease, and the treatment.



This would be turning his talent for observation to a good account, And yet again, if he has some peculiar idiosyncrasy, or has a friend that has one, a complete description, in either case, might prove beneficial to the student, and possibly, it might be rendering a positive service to others. Some will faint at the odor of the rose, others will sweat at the sight of blood, and grow pale at <sup>the</sup> thought of a surgical operation; and some even will sicken at the sight of the scalpel, and prefer dumplings for his dinner, to inhaling the effluvia of a semi-putrified corpse

It is respectfully suggested that an important reform might be brought about in Thesis writing, by enjoining upon candidates the duty of writing out some incidence of their own



experience and observation. Therefore it is respectfully submitted, that every candidate be required to write some portion of his own experience, or, observation of disease, as an inaugural exercise, or, the proving of a remedy, together, with its history and mode of preparation. This will tend to perfect a habit of discrimination, and may result in valuable contributions to our Materia Medica; and moreover, much time would be saved that is usually spent in canvassing for a subject.